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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for implementing oral reports in social studies elementary and secondary classrooms are summarized in this guide. The bulletin offers brief sections on the value of oral reporting; establishment of criteria for oral reports; selection of a topic which is related to the unit under study; the scheduling of reports; various types of reports including discussion of informal, formal, and group reports; and evaluation techniques. A list of references for using oral reports in social studies classes concludes the report. Related documents are SO 005 979 through SO 006 000. (SJM)

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How To Use Oral Reports

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MYRTLE S. LARKIN
Niskayuna High School
Schenectady, New York

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Values of Oral Reports

Almost everybody, man or woman, young or old, occasionally needs to talk to a group. Perhaps it is to make a speech; more often it will be to express an opinion or add information in a discussion of some particular plan or problem. Almost everybody, when this time comes, wishes that he felt more at ease, that he had had more experience in organizing and presenting his ideas orally. Often the rest of the group, too, wishes the speaker expressed himself more easily and with greater clarity.

Instruction in oral expression is not the responsibility solely of teachers of English and speech. It is both desirable and possible to prepare many oral reports as a cooperative effort of English, speech, and social studies teachers and students. The social studies teacher should grasp every opportunity to help develop good oral expression as a part of the requisites for adult citizenship in a democratic nation.

Students in social studies classes can learn to express ideas orally with ease and effectiveness if they have opportunities to practice doing so. Oral reports, properly developed, provide experience which should prove valuable immediately in school life, and later in adult activities. The acceptable oral report requires search for facts, organization of material, clarity of speech and presentation, and, with all these, demonstration of ability to interest the audience. At the same time, oral reports can be planned to enrich the information available to the class and to stimulate their thinking as a particular problem is studied. Both the individual and the group gain from the effective use of oral reports.

It is difficult to realize the potential values of oral reports. Preparation is time consuming for both students and teacher. If the reports are to be effective, it is important to develop a desirable "atmosphere" in the classroom. Although their use requires effort, oral reports can be a most rewarding method of teaching and learning. Proper motivation and good preparation can overcome the most common obstacles—individual fright and group boredom—to make the oral report a popular procedure.

The problems of developing the skills of oral reporting are fundamentally the same in the elementary grades as for the upper grades. Criteria need to be developed; topics should be associated with class work and experience; reports should be timely; and various types of oral reports may be used. As in the upper grades, evaluation techniques are vital to pupil improvement in oral reporting.

Developing Criteria

Student attitudes toward reports are likely to be constructive if students and teacher have worked together to set the goals, and if these goals are clearly defined. One approach is to ask class members what person they most like to hear talk. Students may answer with the name of a teacher, a minister or priest, a local leader, or someone they have heard on radio or television. The question "Why?" will bring out a variety of answers

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NOTE: This *How To Do It* notebook series, designed for a loose-leaf binder, provides a practical and useful source of classroom techniques for social studies teachers. Elementary and secondary teachers alike will find them helpful. The titles now available in this series are: *How To Use a Motion Picture, How To Use a Textbook, How To Use Local History, How To Use a Bulletin Board, How To Use Daily Newspapers, How To Use Group Discussion, How To Use Recordings, How To Use Oral Reports, How To Locate Useful Government Publications, How To Conduct a Field Trip, How To Utilize Community Resources, How To Handle Controversial Issues, How To Introduce Maps and Globes, How To Use Multiple Books, How To Plan for Student Teaching, How To Study a Class, How To Use Sociodrama, How To Work with the Academically Talented in the Social Studies,* and *How to Develop Time and Chronological Concepts.*

Jack W. Miller, George Peabody College for Teachers, is editor of this series. Dr. Miller welcomes comments about the items now in print and suggestions for new titles.

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which can be listed on the blackboard. The list will probably include many of the following reasons:

1. I can understand him.
2. He speaks clearly.
3. He knows what he is talking about.
4. I like his voice.
5. He is interesting.
6. He keeps going; he doesn't have to stop and think of what he is going to say next.

With patience and questioning, students will interpret these statements and establish criteria for their own reports. Such a list might read:

1. Use words which we all know; if new words must be used, put them on the blackboard, pronounce them, and explain their meaning.
2. Use good grammar.
3. Organize the talk and stick to the subject.
4. Make reports interesting; avoid facts already known unless they are necessary to make points clear; use anecdotes and new facts to make a complete report.
5. Speak in a normal voice and so that all may hear.
6. Stand erect; don't fidget.
7. Don't take too long.
8. Look at the audience and tell the story: know content so well that you can tell the story without notes; use notes but *tell* the story; write out the report but become so familiar with its content that you need only to glance at beginnings of sentences, statistics, or other notes and can look at audience most of the time.
9. Report should lead to further class discussion.

It is important that the class also consider the responsibilities of an audience. Students are likely to formulate some such list as follows:

1. Look at speaker; let him see you are interested and expect him to do well.
2. Laugh only at jokes.
3. Sit quietly.
4. Take notes quietly and quickly if the report is for the purpose of acquiring definite information.

Audience performance can make or break the practice of using oral reports in the classroom. Fear of failure before one's peers is a major obstacle to effective speaking. Audience members should be aware of and assume their responsibility to help the speaker succeed. The students should know that one of the chief purposes of oral reports is to develop the ability to stand on one's feet and give a talk before an audience. In the evaluation which follows a report, phases of the talk which were well done should be discussed first. Then the students should "help" their classmate develop his ability to give an oral report by making suggestions for improvement. In that atmosphere the less mature or self-conscious students will be more willing to undertake a report. Evaluations should be based on the criteria which the class has established for judging a report. Thus the person giving the report will know what to expect and is more likely to accept adverse comments as impersonal and fair.

One elementary teacher-principal reported that the following rules for giving oral reports and for listening had been developed in her school for grades three, four, five and six.[1]

1. Choose a subject that interests you.
2. Choose a subject others will like to hear about.
3. Choose a subject you know about.
4. Make each sentence tell about the subject.
5. Identify your subject before talking about it.
6. Try to tell your report and not read it.
7. Don't start to talk until your audience is ready.
8. Don't run sentences together with "and's."
9. Speak loudly and clearly.
10. When you finish ask for questions and answers.

In the sixth grade they added, "Tell where you got your information."

Questions for listeners:

1. Did I listen and not interrupt?
2. Did I take part in the talk?
3. Did I speak in good sentences?
4. Did I say something on the subject?
5. Was I careful to pay attention when someone was talking?

Selection of Topics

The selection of topics for oral reports is extremely important. The best ones are often those suggested by the students themselves. They may grow out of class discussion, a news event of interest to the class, the content of the unit, a movie, a radio or television program, an individual research project, or the like. The teacher may promote interest in a topic by means of a provocative question or statement which will arouse discussion and a desire for further information.

Whatever topics are selected and however they are initiated, they should be related to the unit or topic being studied. The following questions should also be considered:

1. What does the textbook have to say on the topic?
2. Are materials available to prepare a report on the topic?
3. Is the topic worth the time and effort necessary for the individual to develop a good report, and is it worth the class time needed for its presentation?

An oral report on material thoroughly covered by the textbook is worthless, if the text has been studied by the

[1]Harriett Chace, *Social Studies Skills in the Centerville School,* an unpublished Doctor of Education Project, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1953. p. 207.

whole class. However, if the text gives only the provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act, for example, a report on the law, why it was passed, its supporters and opponents and the reasons for their positions would be a useful contribution to class proceedings. A topic on the Suez Canal will be entertaining and more vital if it goes beyond the textbook (the Canal's importance to trade routes and to the British Empire) to tell the story connected with building it, protecting it, Disraeli's purchase of shares for England, the struggle of Egypt to gain control of the territory and finally nationalization and international repercussions.

The teacher should always be certain that materials for preparing an oral report are readily available before the topic is undertaken by a student. If library facilities are inadequate, it is most important that the teacher be alert to sources of free or inexpensive materials and obtain them. Magazine articles can be filed for this purpose, too. Students, if encouraged, will often help to build up a classroom file of useful materials. Once certain that the necessary materials for a given report topic are available, the teacher may properly expect the student to take major responsibility for actually obtaining them.

Preparing an oral report affords opportunity for the better readers to use source materials. The *Federalist Papers* may be used as an example. A student might do a report comparing the ideas of Alexander Hamilton and Robert Lansing on the power of the federal government under the Constitution of the United States. Original sources such as diaries and accounts of travelers may be drawn upon to provide illustrations and to liven a report topic dealing with a particular period of history or a specific region.

Reports which are personalized are likely to be more interesting than general topics. For example, in a unit on the growth of labor unions in the United States, a topic such as "Why I Would Join a Labor Union" would be more appealing to students than "The Values of Labor Unions." A useful booklet on this topic is *Why I Am in the Labor Movement,* by 15 labor leaders.[2] Personal interviews, where appropriate to the report topic, provide valuable material and help increase student interest by providing a personalized approach to a topic which might otherwise remain abstract.

Students need to be warned against a common pitfall in giving reports on the lives of individuals. The encyclopedic kind of biographical report telling that a person was born, lived, did great things, and died, is guaranteed to be unpopular, boring, and not conducive to reaching the goals hoped for by this method of classroom procedure. However, a good report of a person's life could be done by using a variety of sources—books (full length biographies or brief accounts in collections of biography), diaries, magazine articles, and in some cases movies—and a variety of methods of presentation. *Private Lives* by Van Loon may suggest some interesting approaches.

The selection of topics in the elementary grades varies somewhat from that of the junior and senior high school. The whole procedure is more informal and in the primary rooms the topics grow out of the real, direct experiences of the youngsters whether these occur at home or at school. They often relate to the children's plans and activities and may very soon necessitate the gathering of information from other people. Beginning in the third grade or whenever children have learned to consult books for information, some of the reports may include facts gained from printed materials. The topics naturally increase in complexity as the children move through grades four, five, and six, but in any grade there will be a wide range in the comprehensiveness of the topics.

The teachers of the elementary grades have unlimited opportunities for using oral reports. Field trips provide unusual opportunities for informal oral reports. Children like to talk about their pets, what they can do, and how to care for them. Capitalizing on an emerging interest a fourth grade teacher encouraged oral reports on the topic, "How animals protect themselves." The children selected different animals and encyclopedias were used to obtain the information, notes were taken and the reports were given in complete sentences. A chart was made on the blackboard and copied into their notebooks. This same procedure could easily be followed when foods used in various parts of the world are studied and compared. By the time children reach the third grade they are capable of telling others about books, movies, and favorite television programs they enjoy. They may also look up information on places or people in the news and share what they find with others. If they have taken trips with their families, they may use postcards as they talk about their adventure and experiences. Perhaps they might be able to show photographs, souvenir booklets, or color slides that an older brother, sister, or parent had taken, or arrange to have an older person show the slides.

Children like to make things and they should be encouraged to make and use visual aids in their reports. They might use a road map on which they draw a heavy line to show the route they are talking about. For a report on the life of a family in some other part of the world, dolls might be dressed in costumes and a model house or farm constructed. Sixth graders like to prepare bulletin board displays to use as part of their reports. "Life in Ancient Greece" and "Life in Ancient Rome" are good commercial pictures to use for this purpose.[3]

[2]Special Report No. 20. National Planning Association. 1606 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington 9, D. C. January 1949. $1.

[3]The Fideler Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

A youngster's imagination can be stimulated by a single picture so that a story grows out of it. Grant Wood's "Arbor Day" has possibilities along this line and some Currier and Ives prints are appropriate for describing "Life in Great-Grandfather's Day."

Whatever social studies topics are selected and however the reports are presented in the elementary school, they should be functional; that is, they should be an integral part of the learning program, contributing to the orderly expansion of the pupils' world and to their ability to communicate orally what they have found interesting and enjoyable.

Scheduling Reports

Timing of the report is important to make sure that it comes into the learning situation at the appropriate time and that the reports do not all come on the same day or at the end of the unit. Before introducing a unit, the teacher should decide which of the topics included lend themselves to oral reports. This does not preclude spontaneous reports proposed by the students or reports growing out of a group activity. By planning the teacher can make sure that the reports are spaced so that they alternate with other activities. If, during the unit, there is to be a field trip, some interviews, or other out-of-class activities, the findings will probably be excellent material for oral reports. The problem of timing is also partially solved. The report should always be given when the topic to which it is related is being discussed. If a student is not prepared to give his report at that time, it might better be omitted as an oral presentation than delayed. It is seldom good to have more than one or two reports on the same day. Probably in no single unit should all students be required to give a report.

Types of Oral Reports

Informal, incidental reports—Too often we think of oral reports as formal presentations made by an individual standing before the class. Another kind, which receives little attention but is nevertheless useful, is the incidental report. Such a report may be found necessary when, during the class discussion, a question arises on which there is a lack of knowledge on the part of the class, disagreement on facts, or merely additional information someone desires. It may need only a sentence or two or possibly a paragraph of explanation. A student may volunteer or be assigned to look up the information. When he reports he should be prepared to restate the question, give a clear and definite answer, and cite his source or sources of information. Emphasis on the need for doing such an assignment well and on its contribution to the class discussion can foster a respect for its importance. Using the incidental report with slow and shy students is a good way to prepare them for making more formal and longer reports at a later date.

Formal reports—Once an individual has selected a topic for an oral report, he should check his procedure with the teacher. Together they should discuss the sources of information to be consulted and the method of taking notes. When the research is completed, they should consult together again on the organization of the material. After that has been completed, the student should practice his talk before the teacher or one or two friends. His interest is likely to be further aroused and more improvement will probably result if he can record his report on a wire or tape recorder. This will enable him to hear himself and to make suggestions for his own improvement. Young people like to record and play back reports; moreover, the machines are new enough in many schools to lend newness to and enthusiasm for oral reports. By recording and listening to their own reports, students can check their grammar, enunciation, pronunciation, and organization. Not the least important, they can check the question, "Would I like to sit and listen to this report?" If their answer at first hearing is "No," they have a real motive to improve their report.

The use of "props" by older pupils during the presentation of an oral report not only creates audience interest but also gives the shy student something to take his thoughts off himself. There are a number of ways in which reports may be varied by the use of informal stage properties and other devices.

One variation on the individual report as touched on earlier is for a student to prepare a bulletin board and plan his report around it. The bulletin board can, for example, consist of pictures by American artists to illustrate a talk on twentieth century American art; or a series of pictures can be used to summarize a news event of prolonged interest.

A student might use the opaque projector in giving his report. Charts, graphs, cartoons, pictures, or maps help to illustrate or prove a point; these can readily be projected on the screen for all to see clearly, thus facilitating the explanation. A student might use a "Road Map of Industry" graph in presenting a report on United States investments abroad.[4] In any report concerning people and events in a small country such as Ghana, it is helpful to project a map on the screen, for it is difficult to see such small areas on the usual wall map. Pictures of people, showing costumes, work, recreation, education, architecture, help to clarify and to make a report more interesting. Students find it interesting to trace a period in world history through cartoons.

A suitable filmstrip or slide can be used to illustrate a topic: for example, the filmstrip, "A City in the Middle Ages," to illustrate a topic on how the people lived during the Middle Ages; or the filmstrip, "The Universal

[4]Bi-weekly from National Industrial Conference Board, Inc., 845 Third Ave., New York, New York.

Declaration of Human Rights," to pictorialize some aspects of an oral report on that document.

Students can also make effective use of the blackboard in presenting oral reports. One student, for example, developed an interesting talk on the life of Napoleon by drawing stick-figure cartoons on the board. A graph may be placed on the board for the purpose of illustration or as a major part of the report. Diagrams are also helpful.

A report on the music of a nation is much more effective if the reporter plays records to illustrate his story. For example, a topic on American music is much more interesting if it is developed with the use of recordings of American folklore. Recordings of Negro spirituals, songs by Stephen Foster, selections of American jazz, or selections from American opera also add to interest and illustrate the topic. The *You Are There* series and the *I Can Hear It Now* series offer excellent opportunities for using recordings during an oral report.[5]

A student might report on an interview with a person in the community on a question such as the work of the welfare department. One student who volunteered to do such a report brought a case worker to class and interviewed her there. The other students were asked to join in the discussion at the close of the interview.

Group oral reports—Students will often do in groups what they hesitate to do alone. Consequently, a fairly frequent use of group oral reports has value.

One form of group oral report is the panel discussion. It lends itself to presentation of facts and to discussion of different points of view. For example, members of the panel might discuss the arguments for and against federal aid to education or medical care for the aged under Social Security. The panel discussion is mentioned here only as one form of group reporting, for it is a technique in and of itself.

Another type of group discussion is that which grows out of a group project. For instance, an eighth grade class, studying the two newest states and the U. S. territorial possessions, divided into groups, each assuming the responsibility for obtaining information concerning one of the above-mentioned. Their assignment included factual information which all of the class was to be responsible for learning, a booklet, a bulletin board, and an oral report. The reports varied. One group organized its report around a bulletin board on which were photographs of the topography, cities, people, and industries of Alaska. Another group showed a movie on the people of Hawaii and supplemented it with further information and explanation. When they were through, the class knew, among other things, all about poi except how it tasted. A third group did their oral report in the form of an interview with class members who pretended that they were natives telling about Puerto Rico to a group of visitors.

[5]Columbia Recordings, 799 Seventh Ave., New York, New York.

Evaluation

Most elementary and secondary pupils want to know immediately whether or not they have done a good job when they have undertaken a project. If they receive adverse criticisms, it adds to their feeling of security to know at once what their weaknesses are and what they can do to correct them. Therefore, evaluation should follow immediately after the presentation of the oral report. The criteria already developed should be used for self-evaluation and then for group evaluation. Self-evaluations should be attempted first, because, as mentioned in the section on developing criteria, the attitude of class members is most important in this phase of using the oral report technique. The teacher's evaluation, also based upon the student-teacher developed criteria, should be for the purpose of pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of the report which were omitted by the other evaluations.

At the conclusion of the unit, a class discussion would be desirable regarding the contribution that the oral reports made to the success of the unit. Students might also consider what topics might better have been left out and what topics might profitably have been reported on that were not. The latter might take the form of recommendations to the next year's class about good report topics for that particular unit.

Suggested Reading

There is not a great deal of material on the use of oral reports in social studies classes. The following list of references may be helpful.

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